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SUBJECT: DAS KRAMER'S VISIT TO BERLIN, NOVEMBER 17

Classified By: POL M/C John Bauman, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) (Summary) National Security Advisor Christoph Heusgen, MFA Political Director Michael Schaefer, and other senior German officials discussed Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, and Belarus in meetings with DAS Kramer who visited Berlin on November 17. Schaefer and Heusgen argued that we should not set our expectations too high for Russia right now and focus instead on long-term engagement. Alexander Rahr, a leading Germany expert on Russia, suggested that any differences between the Chancellery and the MFA on Russia were less related to policy and more related to the Chancellery's short-term focus on current problems and the MFA's desire to cultivate a long-term strategy. Most of the talk on Ukraine focused on the president and prime minister; Kramer's German interlocutors agreed that Ukrainian PM Yanukovych is the driving force in Kiev, whom the Germans have found to be a pragmatic politician trying to resist being overly dependent on Russia. On Moldova, the Germans supported in principle the idea of replacing the Russian peacekeeping force with an EU-ESDP mission, but they believed progress toward a political settlement would be required before this idea could move forward. Despite Germany's engagement in settling tensions between Georgia and Russia, Berlin is not interested in becoming a mediator and continues to harbor strong concerns and reservations about Saakashvili. (End Summary)

Russia

¶2. (C) Michael Schaefer, MFA political director, started his meeting with Kramer by stating that it will take at least a generation before the state of domestic Russian affairs substantially improves. Given this prognosis, Germany and the U.S. needed to be patient and develop a long-term strategy that did not set unrealistic expectations. Schaefer agreed with Kramer that bringing Russia into rules based institutions like the WTO would help bring about the rule of law and transparency.

¶3. (C) At the Chancellery, National Security Advisor Christoph Heusgen said that despite difficulties, the Germans have had some success with the Russians and pointed towards the improving relationship between Russia and Latvia. The relationship with Russia is a "frustrating one," he said, but "we have to work with these guys, we need them on Iran and other things." Kramer stated that while there are a number of areas where we could work with the Russians the list of concerns about Russia is growing, especially on domestic trends, policy toward Russia's neighbors, and troubling arms sales. When the discussion turned to the EU's attempt to agree on a negotiating framework for the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, Norman Walter, director for Russia at the Chancellery, suggested that the Poles were likely to drop their demand that Russia sign the Energy Charter; however, the Poles were still demanding that Russia drop its import ban on Polish meat.

¶4. (C) DAS Kramer also met with Alexander Rahr from the German Council of Foreign Relations and one of Germany's leading experts on Russia. Rahr stated that splits in the German government on Russia result more from a difference of emphasis than policy. The Chancellery tends to be more pragmatic and focused on how to work with Russia on today's pressing issues, while the MFA takes a longer view and is most interested in slowly building this relationship. Rahr commented that the both the Chancellery and the MFA are concerned about the deteriorating U.S.-Russian relationship and some believe Germany should act as a mediator. Turning to Russia itself, Rahr noted four major developments that deserve closer scrutiny. First, Russia is looking toward China more as a partner than a competitor. Second, Russia is already in election mode and Putin clearly prefers that Medvedev succeed him. Third, the role Poland plays in undermining EU-Russian relations. Fourth, underestimating the power and possibilities that Russia's energy resources give it.

Ukraine

¶5. (C) DAS Kramer said the USG is realistic about what can be achieved with Prime Minister Yanukovych, but wants to engage with him because he is the driving force in the Ukrainian government. Yanukovych, he said, will visit Washington on December 4-5. Both Chancellery and MFA officials agreed that Yanukovych is pragmatic and willing to work with the West because he does not want to be dependent on Russia. Chancellery official Norman Walter did note, however, that many members of the CDU, Chancellor Merkel's party, are still close to Our Ukraine, and refuse to recognize that President Yushchenko is losing influence.

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Kramer said support for Yanukovych's visit to Washington by both FM Tarasyuk and opposition leader Julia Tymoshenko suggested that they, too, realize Yanukovych is calling the shots in Ukraine while Yushchenko is becoming marginalized.

¶6. (C) Walter agreed with Kramer's assessment that President Yushchenko is disengaged, and Walter stated that Yushchenko has been a "puzzle" to the Germans. Even when Yushchenko is on the telephone with the Chancellor he appears indecisive, and did not come to Berlin even after he was personally invited by the Chancellor (Merkel and Yushchenko, he said, have still not met). Walter said the Chancellery is considering inviting Yushchenko to Berlin early next year followed by a visit of Yanukovych one month later; however, Heusgen said that, for the time being, there are no fixed plans for inviting Yushchenko or Yanukovych. Several wondered whether Yushchenko's health was affecting his ability to lead.

¶7. (C) On policy issues, Kramer noted the U.S. did not react strongly to Yanukovych's statements about Ukraine taking a pause on pursuing NATO membership; he said that the U.S. position was to tell Ukrainian officials that Ukraine should proceed toward NATO at its own pace. The USG is urging Yanukovych to push through the many pieces of legislation necessary for Ukraine to qualify for WTO membership. Ambassador Lucas, Special Envoy for Russia at the MFA, agreed that transparency and elimination of the middleman are necessary especially in the energy field, but Yanukovych has done nothing to clean up the murky energy sector since coming to power. Walter agreed with Kramer's assessment that Moldova should be a test case for how constructive a regional role Ukraine would play.

Moldova

¶8. (C) Kramer said that in a meeting on November 16 in

Brussels on Moldova, which included representatives from the EU, U.S., Ukraine and Russia, the Russians indicated they might be open to replacing the Russian peacekeeping force with an EU-Russian ESDP mission. Heusgen and Schaefer both questioned whether a change in the peacekeeping force would be possible without a political deal. Kramer said a political deal can only come after something changes on the ground. Heusgen said he has believed that a deal is possible to enable an EU-Russian ESDP operation to replace the Russian force, but Schaefer warned that the EU would be unwilling to move into a political vacuum. Kramer noted that the U.S. might not get involved in such an ESDP force, and Heusgen agreed that U.S. involvement there should not be necessary. Ambassador Lucas suggested that Ukraine and Kazakhstan might be willing to contribute to an ESDP mission.

¶9. (C) Turning to how to move forward on Moldova, Chancellery and MFA officials argued that Russia was the key player. Schaefer thought Russia might be more willing to move forward if Russia's troop presence in Moldova was de-linked from fulfilling the Istanbul Commitments. Schaefer in a personal aside stated he did not think the Russian troops in Moldova fall under the Istanbul commitments. Kramer pushed back and said the U.S. has a strongly different view on this. Lucas suggested using the 5 2 negotiating framework (including Moldova and Transnistria) would work best. Kramer countered that the 5 2 format is a charade, but a necessary one so that the parties sit down and talk instead of engaging in provocations.

Georgia

¶10. (C) Heusgen said the Chancellor stresses with both the Russians and Georgians the importance of scaling down their rhetoric. She also told Putin that Russia must stop kicking out Georgian schoolchildren. Chancellery Director Walter said while the Germans are very active in promoting improved Russian-Georgian relations, with Foreign Minister Bezuashvili on the phone virtually every other day with Heusgen, the Germans are not interested in assuming the role of a public mediator.

¶11. (C) Heusgen noted that Saakashvili had gone with military forces into Ajaria two years ago, and promised to give greater autonomy to this region, but has failed to do so. Consequently, concerns about Saakashvili have some justification. Kramer said that the U.S., while somewhat frustrated with recent Georgian moves such as the handling of the arrest of the four Russian spies, has stressed to Saakashvili that the use of force in Ossetia and Abkhazia is unacceptable. At the same time, Russia has not completely given up its repressive measures against Georgians inside Russia, Kramer emphasized, and Gazprom's doubling of Georgian

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gas prices was a further provocation and source of political pressure. Heusgen agreed with Kramer that the ouster of Defense Minister Okruashvili was a positive development. Kramer walked through with Schaeffer and others the confidence building measures the U.S. was proposing to both the Georgian and Russian sides.

Belarus

¶12. (C) NSA Heusgen said that Belarus President Lukashenko is off balance because he did not expect the Russians to raise energy prices. He and Kramer agreed that the West's best strategy for dealing with Lukashenko at this point is to "watch him squirm" in his current difficulties. Kramer noted that a Belarus official had recently approached the U.S. Embassy with a request to meet Kramer in New York because of Lukashenko's alleged desire to improve relations; but, Kramer declined and told the official to contact our Ambassador in Minsk. Heusgen and Kramer agreed that the West

should set clear benchmarks, such as the release of political prisoners, for any improvement in relations.

¶13. (C) Amb. Lucas characterized recent German contact with Minsk as disappointing, with no new thinking on the Belarusian side and unwillingness to consider even small steps. Lucas agreed with Kramer that the West should stay united; we have to wait until Belarus makes some positive moves. Lucas suggested that while Lukashenko and Putin do not like each other, Russia does not want to risk losing Lukashenko and possibly control of Belarus.

¶14. (C) Alexander Rahr informed Kramer that he was approached by Belarusian authorities on the possibility of interviewing Lukashenko for an article in the German daily, Die Welt, which he has tentatively accepted, although the date for the interview has not been finalized. Rahr has heard that other major European papers have been approached as well including, Le Figaro. Rahr speculated that Lukashenko's outreach might be caused by increasing pressure from Moscow. Making it clear that Lukashenko would not be arrested once he stepped down might make a transition easier, according to Rahr. Kramer agreed but stated it should be equally clear that Lukashenko would have to leave Belarus after freeing all political prisoners.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: Kramer's visit was a good opportunity for stock-taking on German views on Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and the Russian-Georgian situation, and for the most part, our views coincide on the key issues, though areas of emphasis may differ. Rumors that rifts exist between the Chancellery and MFA were supported in these discussions. German support for a possible replacement of the Russian peacekeeping force in Moldova was especially welcome given resistance to this idea in Brussels at the EU. Similar assessments on Belarus and Ukraine were also encouraging. With German ascendancy to EU and G-8 presidency, continued consultations over the next 12 months on these issues will be extremely important. END COMMENT

¶16. (U) DAS Kramer cleared this message.
TIMKEN JR